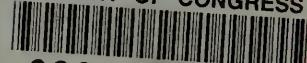


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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN

**GEORGETOWN, KY.**

**JULY 26, 1830.**

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BY JOEL S. BACON, A. M.  
PRESIDENT OF THE GEORGETOWN COLLEGE.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

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GEORGETOWN, KY.

PRINTED BY N. L. FINNELL.

1830.



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## INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

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FELLOW-CITIZENS:

To an American citizen, every thing connected with the preservation of our liberties—with the security of that precious boon which Heaven has granted us, in the gift of civil and religious freedom—cannot fail to be deeply interesting.

It is natural for us, when contemplating the prospect that lies before us as a nation, to inquire, with some degree of solicitude, what is to be the event of the present state and order of things?—Of our system of government, and of the free republican institutions, which we enjoy? What is to be the issue of that grand experiment of self-government, which is now in progress by an enlightened and intelligent people—an experiment, in which are interested not only our own citizens, and the multitudes of their descendants, who are yet to occupy the stage of human life—but other millions, who, from every portion of the civilized world, are gazing with intense anxiety upon the operation of a system which promises, if successful, to furnish to every nation on earth, which is capable of appreciating and enjoying its advantages, the model of a social compact which secures the greatest amount of freedom and of happiness, consistent with the nature of man, and the constitution of civil society.

In the result of inquiries like these, we cannot, with a due regard for our welfare, and for that of our fellow-men around us, but feel a deep and lively interest. To the destiny of hopes like those inspired by only a brief survey of our past history, and by a single glance at the bright futurity which opens up in prospect before us, no rational man can be indifferent. It becomes us, then, as citizens of a free republic, to cherish a due regard for all of its great and important interests; to maintain a watchful observance of the course of events; and to endeavor, by all the means in our power, to guard against the threatening dangers which may beset its path.

We do but justice to the venerable heroes of our revolution, when we render to them, for their valor and patriotism, the highest tribute of our grateful admiration. To them, under God, we owe the inestimable privileges we now enjoy; and

we should be justly chargeable with the basest ingratitude, were not their names and their virtues ever held by us, in affectionate remembrance. But our duty to ourselves, and to succeeding generations, stops not here. Upon us devolves the charge of those invaluable rights and privileges which were purchased at the price of so much blood and treasure, and often, too, at the expense of sacrifices, even dearer than life itself. We owe it to the memory of those who nobly consecrated, upon the altar of liberty, "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor," to preserve the precious gem thus dearly bought, untarnished; and to hand it down to posterity undiminished in its splendor and unshorn of its beauty. It is the bright memorial of achievements more renowned than any others which grace the page of our history; and if cherished with proper care, it will ever prove like a charm against those dire calamities which have beset other nations, whose star of glory is set in everlasting night.

To us, then, the inquiry comes fraught with considerations of the highest moment—How we may discharge the great and important duties which rest upon us as American citizens?—How we may contribute most to the stability and perpetuity of those invaluable institutions which have been handed down to us from our forefathers; which are at once the blessings and the ornaments of our country; and in whose integrity and durability, the political and moral destiny of unborn millions is involved?

One answer which I propose to these important inquiries is, by encouraging a system of education adapted to the genius, and in some degree commensurate with the wants, of our country.

This, it is believed, is the best—indeed, the only appropriate means of effecting all that we could desire for the permanence of our blessings, and for the happiness of our country. And this is not all; such a plan is not only desirable for the purpose of improving generally the condition of man, nor for the benefit only of a more refined and elevated circle of society; but it is believed to be absolutely necessary for the very support and existence of our civil government. Without it, no permanent authority, short of absolute despotism, can ever be maintained. To think of governing intelligent men, by the fear only of corporal punishment—by the restraints of mere physical force—is preposterous in the extreme. His *body* you may, indeed, for a time fetter and control; but "the enlightened, rational, heaven-born *soul* of man, who can tame?" True it is, that by neglect, or improper culture during the season of youth, the spring time of life, you may suffer the seeds of vice and immorality, "sown by an enemy's hand," to spring up in the bosom: You may allow the noxious plants to grow up to a

fearful maturity, so that no human power shall be sufficient to eradicate them. From the tender years of infancy, when there sleeps in his breast the embryo of all that is amiable in morality and in the social virtues, together with the germe of every fierce and baneful passion, you may bring forth upon the stage of life, a monster in the shape of man; prepared to diffuse around him the poison of his own cup; to spread ruin and desolation in his path; and to sink at last, in disgrace and infamy; a frightful monument of moral depravity and mental degradation! From the very first step of such a downward progress, would we save, if possible, the youth of our country, by bringing them early within the reach of proper intellectual and moral culture; by furnishing them with ample means of knowing what is for their greatest good; and by placing before them the strongest motives that can influence an intelligent mind, to pursue the path of rectitude, and to render themselves blessings and ornaments to society. It is effects like those (to which we have just alluded) that a judicious system of education is designed, and is eminently calculated to counteract. To check the wayward propensities of the young and inexperienced; to regulate their habits and dispositions: to instil into their minds correct moral sentiments; and in short, to give "form and consistency" to the whole character, which the events of future life will rarely, if ever counteract, must be the great object of any plan of education which is founded on just and rational principles. And here, for our encouragement in an arduous and difficult task, we have the assurance that the fruit of our labor shall be an abundant reward for all our toil: For as certainly as there is truth in the declarations of wisdom, or order and harmony in the moral government of the universe, the course of nature shall not be changed.—"According to what a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" And, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

In any general plan, it will be admitted on all hands, that primary schools for juvenile education, are of the very first importance. No community, it is believed, can flourish long without them; none can long enjoy the privileges of a free people, or of a liberal and enlightened government. They are the boast of our country, as the means of diffusing universally, that amount of intelligence and information which is necessary to render her citizens virtuous and enlightened freemen. It is, doubtless, this universal diffusion of intelligence among all ranks and classes of the community, which we are to regard as the grand palladium of our national liberty; our strongest defence against the encroachments of tyranny; the surest pledge of our national prosperity. On this as its chief pillar and support, rests the magnificent fabric of American, republican freedom.

Nor are these primary schools important, merely as fountains of knowledge and intellectual improvement to the young. Here are usually made the first developements of character. Habits and disposition are formed, which will exert an incalculable influence over all the future destiny of the man. Who does not refer to the scenes of his childish sports; to the discipline of his school-boy days, for much of what has given a colouring to all the events of his subsequent life? How important, then, that these elementary institutions; these nurseries, in a great degree, of whatever is to constitute the moral and intellectual character of the American people; be every where carefully cherished, and that their advantages be every where enjoyed! In their number, and their efficient management, we feel assured, is involved all that is grand in the prospect, and splendid in the destiny of our beloved country! It may, indeed, seem inappropriate, on an occasion like the present, before an enlightened audience, like that which I now have the honor to address, to advocate, strenuously, a system of common-school education; but so deeply am I impressed with the importance of the subject, and so fully am I convinced of the utility of *system*, in the plan adopted, that I could not withhold this slight expression of my sentiments.

Let then, these fountains of elementary knowledge be preserved pure and uncorrupted: Let their healing streams be carried to every village and hamlet in the nation: And let every individual feel that the safety and happiness of his country depend upon the regard he cherishes for these, the cradle of her geniuses, the nurseries of her young and tender spirits!

But our public literary institutions, of a more elevated character, our academies, colleges, and other seminaries of learning, bear a no less important part, in such a system of education as is adapted to the character, or adequate, in any degree, to the wants of our country. To these institutions we must look for the education of most of the young men, who are to fill stations of the highest trust, and most extensive usefulness in our country; who are to constitute a large majority in the several learned professions, and to fill the stations of instructors of the youth and rising generation; who are to be the dispensers of public justice from the judicial bench—to guide our political destinies in the several executive departments, and in our halls of legislation; who are to figure in our literary history—to fix the standard of public taste at home—and to give our country character and reputation abroad, in all the higher departments of learning and the arts.

Those young men, too, who resort to these public institutions for purposes of education, however far they may previously have advanced, in the formation of their individual characters, are yet, in most instances, to make the short period of

their collegiate course—the one eventful crisis—the grand climacteric of their lives. New habits, and modes of thinking, are acquired; new plans of life are adopted; and a permanent foundation laid, for whatever of excellence is to distinguish the future man.

It is a notorious, and not unfrequently a melancholy fact, that most young men, who enjoy the advantages of a liberal education, with the opportunity thus afforded them for preparation, make this the grand starting point in that career of splendor and usefulness, or of disgrace and infamy, which mark the geniuses, and unhappily divide the men of greatest talents, and intellectual endowments of any age or country.

Since then, the instructions afforded, and the moral and intellectual discipline adopted at such institutions, are to form the character, and, under God, to fix the destiny of hundreds and thousands of our young men of greatest promise, who will go forth into public life, prepared to exert the widest influence, and to scatter farthest, the effects of their own mental energies and acquisitions; who are to guide the opinions, and to control the inclinations of multitudes of their fellow-men, upon subjects connected with the vital interests of community—Is it not a matter of the highest importance that they be regarded with the consideration, and that they be cherished with the careful solicitude which their exalted station and purpose demand? Let institutions of this kind, then, be fostered by the patronage and liberality of a community, deeply sensible of their great importance to its truest interests, and its highest happiness.

My friends—methinks I see, in the occasion which has this day called us together, a pleasing proof that this subject has dwelt upon *your* minds with much of its high and moving interest. You have appreciated, in some good degree, at least, the value of a more extended course of education, and have contributed liberally, for the purpose of securing to the youth and rising generation around you, its inestimable advantages. May the noble efforts, which you are thus making, in conjunction with others, be crowned with the most complete and gratifying success! May the institution, which shall thus be reared by the munificence, and sustained by the patronage of an enlightened community, be rendered an efficient instrument of extensive usefulness! And may it long continue a conspicuous monument of the enlightened zeal and patriotism of those who generously contributed to its foundation and to its ultimate success!

But it is not solely to the routine of school-boy studies, nor yet to the more elevated pursuits, and the liberal discipline of a College course, that we are to look for all the practical results which we contemplate in the formation of individual character. These are far from being all the

causes which are concerned in producing the great variety of tastes, of habits, and propensities which are materially to affect, and in a great degree, to control his conduct through life. A system of education in its widest sense must embrace all those combinations of circumstances in which the youth is trained up from infancy to the time when he steps forward upon the stage of life—prepared to mingle in its busy scenes, and to exert an influence through all the circle of society with which he is connected. Much, then, very much, must be left to the effect of parental discipline.

No one, who has not reflected deeply upon the subject, can appreciate the importance of those early instructions which are communicated during the tender years of childhood, when the mind is susceptible of any impressions, which surrounding objects and the thoughts and feelings of others, such as are adapted to its capacity, are calculated to give. The tales related to us in our infancy are never forgotten; the first elements of knowledge acquired in the nursery are to be the foundation of all our future acquisitions; and the sentiments and feelings there imbibed, we shall carry with us to the latest day of our lives. Who, then, can estimate the importance of a parent's charge, in the early education of his offspring?

In our own favored country, far more than in any other, is it in the parent's power to direct the fortunes, and, under Providence, to control the destinies of his children. In other countries, there are adventitious circumstances of birth and fortune, which render it next to impossible, for an individual to travel beyond that sphere of life, to which he may seem thus to have been destined. But with us, distinctions of rank, save those of personal worth, and individual merit, are almost wholly unknown. Every avenue, in private life, to wealth and respectability, or in public, to reputation, to honor and usefulness, is open alike to all—"opifex fortunæ quisque fit"—every man becomes emphatically the artificer of his own fortune.

As the natural and appropriate consequence of that course of discipline and education, which he has himself adopted, the father may see his son become the inmate of a College, or of a Counting-House, the promising candidate for professional distinction; or the successful competitor for fame in the higher walks of literature, or in the arena of political life. But, alas! this is not all—as, in a great measure, the unhappy result of his own want of paternal care, or of kindness, misdirected, his heart may be pained, and his cup of earthly enjoyment deeply imbibited, by seeing his son become a miserable outcast from society; the tenant of a dungeon, or, perhaps, exposed to suffer, still more ignominiously, the penalty of crimes committed against the laws, the peace and safety of his country.

In like manner, the labors of *maternal love*, judiciously, or otherwise employed, may render the object of a mother's tenderest solicitude, the grace and ornament of her sex; the devoted wife; the respected matron; beloved and honored by all who know her, and who can appreciate the excellence of moral worth, and of domestic virtues. Or, unhappily, on the other hand, they may cause her to reap the bitter fruits of female indiscretion, in lasting regret and unavailing sorrow. Let it not be supposed, then, that those parents can remain wholly unchargeable with the destiny of their offspring, who, by an utter neglect or a gross mismanagement of their education, greatly increase the dangers that beset the paths of youth, and multiply, indefinitely, the chances of their ruin.

But, in order to render the system of moral and intellectual discipline complete, there is one feature, which, from its importance, demands particular attention. I refer to what may be very properly denominated the religious part of education. By this term, however, I mean not the inculcation of any sectarian creed—not the peculiar tenets of any denomination of Christians. On these subjects, the minds of youth who resort to a public literary institution, which professes not to be sectarian in its character, should, doubtless, be left perfectly free. The scriptures are open—let them examine for themselves. But the great and fundamental truths of Christianity; those general principles, which lie at the very foundation of all morals and religion; and which need only to be understood by an unprejudiced and ingenuous mind, to be believed—should be made an essential part of education, wherever it is desired that man should know and properly estimate the duties he owes to God and to his fellow-man; or where it is wished that men should be treated as rational, moral, and therefore accountable beings.

However strongly the charge of bigotry and enthusiasm may be urged against those who consider this a subject of paramount importance; no one, upon the slightest reflection, can fail to perceive the utility—nay, the absolute necessity of inculcating every where upon society, the restraints of moral and religious obligation. It has been found necessary for the maintenance of social order, in all ages, and among all nations of the world. Man is, by nature, a religious being. You cannot, if you would, free him, wholly, from the consciousness that he is accountable to some tribunal, for the rectitude of his moral conduct. Divest him of the motives to morality, which this supplies; let him loose upon the world, fearless of a God—of an unerring tribunal of justice, and a future state of perfect retribution; and you send him forth, a reckless wanderer, amid earth's scenes of misery and crime, prepared only to mingle the fury of his own malignant passions, with the wretchedness

of that existence, which is without the hope of life and immortality beyond the grave.

Let it not be urged, then, nor felt, that the salutary restraints of religious obligation, are calculated to subserve only the cause of superstition and fanaticism. Desecrate the temples of the living God, and demolish the shrines of religious worship in our country, and it will require no long deductions of reason, and but a single argument drawn from the results of universal experience, to show that the horrors of the French revolution were but a single act, in that frightful drama, which would render the world one-dreadful scene of anarchy, violence and bloodshed! I rejoice, however, in the belief, that there are very few—I could hope, none, who would deliberately blot out the sun from our moral heavens; who would banish the light of Christianity from the earth, and leave mankind to the cheerless gloom of Atheism, or to the darkness of Heathenism and Pagan Idolatry.

It may, perhaps, be expected, that something will be said, at this time, upon the comparative merits of the different plans of education, which have been proposed to the public for consideration, and many of which are now in the progress of experiment, in the various Literary Institutions of our country. A particular notice of all, or, indeed, any considerable number of these, would lead me into useless detail. A glance only, can be taken at one or two of the general divisions.

This is truly an age, abounding in improvements, and prolific in invention; it breathes the very spirit of enterprise in every department of human thought, feeling and action. But the tendency of public sentiment is to alternate extremes; to extravagance in novelty. It needs to be occasionally checked, by the cool calculations of reason; by the results of calm and sober reflection.

There has been, within a few years past, a strong disrelish manifested, in the public mind, for the ancient regimen, the old established order of things, in regard to education. Many have been of the opinion, and among these, some very learned and judicious men, that in the course of studies prescribed in our Colleges, generally, too much time and attention were required to the Dead Languages, and the ancient classics; that most of the youth of our country, being required to be trained up for the active and ordinary business of life, there could be very little necessity for their acquiring an extensive knowledge of these abstract, and, therefore, less useful branches; that a decidedly more *practical* discipline was required; a course, it has been conceived, better calculated to fit them for the real and active employments in which they were to be engaged. These, and many other objections of like character, have been urged with much zeal, and, it must be confessed, with no little plausibility, against the or-

dinary course of instruction, pursued in our Colleges and other Literary Institutions of the higher order. We have much reason for gratitude, that these and similar queries have been started, and that much, which, we may hope, will prove to be useful discussion, has been elicited upon this important subject. It has led to a review of the whole ground; to a more thorough investigation, and, it is believed, a much better understanding of the whole subject of education; its great design and object, and of the best means of attaining that object. Many of the most learned and intelligent men of our country, have individually been induced to make it a subject of deep and mature reflection. Committees of public literary institutions, have been selected for the express purpose of examining deliberately, and of reporting their sentiments upon the subject.

And the concurrent testimony of all these authorities, so far as it has yet been ascertained, is, that, although in communicating instruction; in the imparting of knowledge, in all the various departments of learning and the arts, there is, doubtless, much room for improvement, and much may be expected; yet, in the course and order of studies, ordinarily prescribed for a liberal education, *no essential alteration* should be made; that the study of the ancient classics, and the higher branches of Mathematicks, should, by no means, be dispensed with in our public literary institutions; and that the interests of learning, and the highest purposes of education, will be best secured by a continuance of the present general plan, modified only by such improvements as are calculated to render it more efficient, and, perhaps, more extensively applicable to the common arts and business of life.

What, in truth, is the grand design and object of what is properly called a liberal education? Is it the acquisition of facts only—mere insulated truths—such as are afforded abundantly by the ordinary phenomena of nature, and the common business of life? It is about these, truly, that the instruction, commonly termed *practical*, is chiefly employed: But is there not something of vastly greater importance, and which comes still nearer to the foundation and ground work of a thorough education? Is it not, after all, the *discipline of the mind*, which it is the great object of an *intellectual* education, particularly in its earlier stages, to secure; rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge, however desirable it may be, in any of the departments of learning, or in any of the branches of human science? It is, indeed, this discipline, if it be thoroughly and judiciously conducted, which prepares the mind for the reception of knowledge, whether from books, or from the contemplation of nature; or from any other of all that infinite variety of sources which furnish appropriate subjects for human thought and investigation. The first object to be aimed at in a well directed course of intellectual discipline, is doubtless, by a

careful and judicious exercise of all of its powers and faculties, to strengthen and invigorate the mind. It is, in fact, by such a process only, that the mind can ever reach a perfect and full maturity. For, like the body, if consigned to inactivity, or if it be subjected only to occasional and irregular efforts, it attains to but a sickly growth; or from a widely disproportionate development, it comes to resemble rather the deformity of a shapeless and unsightly monster, than the beauty and symmetry of nature's perfect work. Now it is precisely this kind of appropriate and judicious mental exercise, to which I have just alluded, that the system of education, whose merits we are at this moment discussing, is calculated to supply; and to no part of that system is the fact just stated, more applicable, than to the study of the dead languages. Here we have occasion for the vigorous exertion of all the faculties of the mind. Perception, memory, judgement, reason, are alike actively and profitably employed; so that no kind of studies, (and I believe the fact is generally admitted by those who are capable of judging in the case) affords to the mind, in all its active powers, greater, if as much improvement. All this, too, besides the advantages which such studies afford to the student, in furnishing him with the means of acquiring readily, the technicals of almost every profession; by unlocking to him the rich treasures of ancient literature; by supplying him with a vast variety, and some of the noblest specimens of thought, of feeling, and of sentiment, which the inspiration of poetry and eloquence has ever produced. But, what is more than all, particularly to him, who regards the volume of Divine inspiration, as a treasure of inestimable value; it enables him to consult the sacred oracles, in the languages in which they were originally written, from whence there may be drawn innumerable illustrations, which no mere translation can ever supply.

But again: The next great object, in an intellectual education, is to furnish the mind with general principles, and with methods of investigation. Mere facts are chiefly dependant upon the memory; are, in general, easily acquired, and when not constantly recurring, are as easily forgotten; but general facts—rules which are every day in practice—are without difficulty retained, for all the important purposes for which they are designed. When once it has obtained the command of its own powers, now somewhat matured and strengthened by an appropriate system of exercise; when it is furnished with general rules, with the *modus operandi* in all the various departments, into which the subjects of human knowledge naturally divide themselves—the mind comes forth to the investigation of truth, prepared to exert a power, and to act with an energy, which it is believed, no other course of discipline, can possibly enable it to acquire. It is to a result like this, that the study of *Mathematics*, and the abstruse branch-

es of science, contributes in an eminent degree. It is, indeed, their appropriate office to strengthen and invigorate the reasoning powers; to induce habits of patient study and of thorough investigation: In short, to fit the mind for some of its noblest and most successful efforts in the cause of truth, of religion, and of humanity.

Thus, we see, from the very slight survey which we have taken, that no part of the materials which constitute, in the view of those whose opinions are, and ought to be respected, a liberal education can well be spared. It were better, methinks, far better, if possible, to furnish the youth of our country with greater encouragements to avail themselves of all the advantages which a thorough and extended course of education can afford; and thus to prepare themselves for acting their part in life, with greater acceptance; and for becoming more extensively useful, as citizens, as men, and as christians.





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